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RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ MAR 0477
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS IMMEDIATE 2429
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL IMMEDIATE 2012
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C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 000537

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [MASS](#) [MOPS](#) [SNAR](#) [PTER](#) [EC](#)
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR AND NEW MINDEF DISCUSS COOPERATION

Classified By: PolOff Jarahn Hillsman, Reasons 1.4 (b&d)

11. (C) Summary: In her initial call on newly appointed Minister of Defense Lorena Escudero on March 1, the Ambassador highlighted successful U.S. military led humanitarian and security projects, and stressed the importance of continued cooperation. She conveyed USG concern over reports that Escudero would participate in the "No-Bases" conference in Quito and/or Manta, and explained the importance of the FOL in the regional anti-narcotics fight. Escudero expressed GOE gratitude for USG support, and stressed the need to increase the role of the Ecuadorian military in northern border development activities. She was unaware of the specifics of the No-Bases event and did not have plans to attend, but reaffirmed the GOE position not to renew the agreement. End Summary.

Background

12. (SBU) The Ambassador paid a courtesy call on Defense Minister Lorena Escudero on March 1 in her office. She was accompanied by the MILGP Commander and the Acting Defense Attache. Escudero was joined by Chief of Staff Colonel Ruben Leon and International Affairs Advisor Colonel Roberto Vasconez. The introductory meeting was cordial, with both the Ambassador and Escudero agreeing to continue mutually beneficial cooperation.

Ambassador Highlights USG Support

13. (C) The Ambassador stressed the need to continue USG-GOE collaboration to counter the growing narco-terrorist threat, and noted that joint efforts had enhanced the security and the quality of life of Ecuadorians living in the Ecuador-Colombia border region. Escudero thanked the Ambassador for this "positive" cooperation, and said that she would work to increase the Ecuadorian military's social agenda in the border region. She told the Ambassador that the Ministry of Defense (MOD) would soon sign a cooperative agreement with the Ecuadorian Northern Border Unit (UDENOR) to increase its role in supporting infrastructure projects in the region (SEPTEL). Getting the military engaged in development will inspire a wider array of Ecuadorians to also get involved, Escudero affirmed.

Ambassador Stresses Importance of FOL

14. (C) The Ambassador emphasized the importance of the Manta

Forward Operation Location (FOL) in the regional anti-narcotics fight, but said that the USG would respect the GOE's eventual decision on whether or not to renew. She stressed the importance of achieving continued positive results through 2009, and the need for the Embassy and the MOD to maintain fluid communication on FOL operations. She invited Escudero to visit the FOL for a full briefing. Escudero reaffirmed the GOE's position not to renew the agreement, and said that she would visit the Eloy Alfaro Airbase (where the FOL is located) soon.

15. (C) Escudero reluctantly told the Ambassador that Ecuadorian Air Force officials had complained to her about what they considered to be inadequate compensation to Ecuador for use of the Eloy Alfaro Airbase. She noted, however, that she needed to study their requests further and would engage on the issue at a later date.

16. (C) While Escudero appeared to downplay Ecuadorian Air Force complaints for the moment, Ecuadorian Air Force Chief General Jorge Gabela strongly expressed his discontent to visiting U.S. 12th Air Force Commander Lt. General Norman Seip in a separate February 28 meeting. Gabela told General Seip that the U.S. does not recognize Ecuador's efforts to combat narco-trafficking. Gabela said that the Eloy Alfaro Airbase has cost Ecuador \$1.5 million to date with "zero" support from the US. "We are fighting the drug war, but you don't support us," Gabela declared.

Ambassador & MinDef Discuss Cooperation

17. (C) Escudero thanked the Ambassador for USG assistance in developing the information operations center at the Ministry of Defense, and for the equipment to support their information outreach campaign. She said she was impressed by the center, noting its positive role in working to enhance the image of the Ecuadorian military in the border region. The Ambassador expressed USG desire to deepen such cooperation and suggested that the Escudero consider IMET training courses available to both military and civilian security experts. The Ambassador stressed the importance of Escudero's appointment as the civilian head of the Ecuadorian military and invited her to visit Washington. Escudero said she would like to visit Washington very soon.

Escudero Cold on "No-Bases" Conference

18. (C) The Ambassador asked Escudero if she had been invited to speak at the "No-Bases" conference in Quito and Manta March 5-9. Escudero said that she had received an invitation, but was unaware of the group and their intentions and had asked for a report on their background. The Ambassador expressed USG concern over the no-bases movement, and explained that the far-left organization purports myths as fact and may not have Ecuador's best interest at heart. (Note: To date, Escudero has not participated in the "No-Bases" conference. Instead, she delegated her Undersecretary of Defense Miguel Carvajal to represent her at the March 6 inaugural session. He reaffirmed the GOE position not to renew the FOL agreement after 2009, calling it a matter of national sovereignty. End note.)

Comment

19. (C) Escudero appeared more confident in-person than she has in public events or interviews, and seemed sincerely open to deepening GOE-USG cooperation. She has taken on Larriva's charge to increase military social outreach, and appears aware of current efforts. However, it remains to be seen how much control she will actually exercise over Ecuador's national security agenda. We have made numerous attempts to respond to Gabela's complaints as well as others within the Ecuadorian Air Force, and will continue to do so, although expectations management is also called for.

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